

The Dr. Gertrude A. Barber National Institute — Preventing Secondary Conditions Associated with the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs): A Training Program for Practitioners Working with Children with Autism



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has awarded a grant to The Dr. Gertrude A. Barber National Institute in Erie, PA. This grant funds the development of a specialized training and certification program for parents, professionals, and paraprofessionals who serve children with autism.

Overview: The program will highlight techniques for teaching behavioral and communication skills to children with autism. These skills are considered important for maximizing independence and quality of life. Training participants will receive 6 months of classroom instruction. They will also take part in guided practice through direct, on-site visits or through videotaped sessions. A specialized training manual and CD-ROM will be developed to evaluate and reinforce training concepts.

The Growing Need: The number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) is increasing rapidly. At the same time, awareness of this disability among professionals and educators is expanding. This increased awareness has led to the development of new interventions, shown through research to be effective with some groups of children with ASDs. While these interventions have been clearly identified, to be effective they must be implemented consistently in the home, school, and community. There is a growing need for professionals, parents, and paraprofessionals who are trained in the proper delivery of these evidence-based techniques.

Project Objectives: It is our belief that an effective training or certification program must be competency-driven and performance-based. The selected model will therefore provide basic, standardized, and competency-based training. Content will focus on addressing the primary needs of individuals with ASD and their families. To reach practitioners across the country, we will use videoconferencing technology in our training activities.

The first training program began November 8, 2004, at the Barber National Institute. This training will continue in weekly sessions through June 2005. Twenty participants will be enrolled in the first class.

Results or Benefits Expected: The training program is designed to achieve the following benefits:

- More effective services for children with autism nationwide.
- A replicable training protocol for practitioners, parents, and paraprofessionals.
- Access to quality training programs for professionals, parents, and paraprofessionals in all demographic sectors, including rural areas.
- A projected reduction of public financial resources for long-term support of children with ASD as a result of effective early, intensive, behavioral intervention.

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